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ABSTRACT

A study investigated how people make indirect refusals ("You don't need to move the bookcase" meaning "No, I won't help you move it"), and the types of information used to do so. Two experiments were conducted. The first asked 130 students (third, fifth, and eighth graders as well as college undergraduates) to write refusals to a simple request. The second involved 48 pairs of students (from the same grade levels) in role plays. Results showed that refusals were made by canceling contextual information supporting the request (speaker's goal, speaker's situation, hearer's situation, hearer's reason to comply), and also by proposing action by the speaker to achieve his or her goal. Types of refusals were categorized and the conformability of contextual information used between speaker and hearer was measured. Third graders used the same types of refusals as undergraduates, but the frequencies of use were different. Findings suggest that the fundamental framework for making refusals--using contextual information--is in place before the third grade, and its use develops with age. (Two references, one table of data, and one figure are attached.) (SR)

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A DEVELOPMENTAL STUDY ON PRODUCTION OF REFUSALS

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INTRODUCTION

Indirect expressions such as "I don't have it" which actually means "No, I don't give it to you", can be seen commonly in the use of language, but it is not known how people make it and understand it. In this study, I investigated how people made indirect refusals from the viewpoint of developmental cognitive psychology.

In the previous study on indirect requests (Naka & Muto, 1983), we showed that people made and understood the indirect requests by using the contextual information, such as the speaker(requesting person)'s goal which caused the request, the speaker's situation where he could not achieve his goal by himself, the hearer(requested person)'s situation to achieve the speaker's goal, and the hearer's reason to obey the speaker's request. People made indirect requests by referring to these contextual information (eg. by referring to the speaker's goal, "I want to look at the dictionary.", one can ask for the dictionary. cf. Searle, 1975), and people understood the indirect requests better, given with such contextual information.

Indirect refusals are supposedly expressed to

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the requests, and in such situations, the speaker and the hearer must share the same context. If so, it is hypothesized that indirect refusals as well as indirect requests are produced by using such contextual information. In this study, then, I focused on the types of information used in the refusals, and investigated it in the questionaire and the role-play experiment.

EXPERIMENT 1

In the first place, 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders and undergraduates (130 Ss. in all) were asked to write down refusals to simple requests such as "Help me to relocate a bookcase" in a questionaire.

The types of refusals were categorized (Table 1). The results showd that refusals were made by cancelling the contextual information as "You don't need to relocate the bookcase" (cancelling the speaker's goal), "You mustn't be so busy now." (cancelling the speaker's situation), "I am tired now." (cancelling the hearer's situation to achieve the speaker's goal), and "I don't have to do it." (cancelling the hearer's reason to obey the speaker's request), and also by proposing the information on the speaker's own action to achive his goal: "You'd better do that by yourself."

Even the 3rd graders made the same types of refusals as the undergraduates, but the frequen-

cies of information used were different. The younger subjects were more apt to refer to the speaker's and hearer's actions, which were supposed to be rather direct information. On the other hand, older subjects were more apt to refer to the speaker's and hearer's situations, which were supposed to be rather indirect information.

EXPERIMENT 2

In the second place, I studied the role-play conversation to see the dynamic use of such contextual information. Other group of 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders and undergraduates were invited to participate in the experiment in pair(48 pairs in all), and each member of the pair was assigned to the speaker's role or the hearer's role. Then, they performed a request-refusal conversation. Supposed relationship between a speaker and a hearer were different in familiarity: family kinship, classmates, and a customer and a clerk.

Again, the types of refusals (hearer's expression) as well as requests (speaker's expression) were categorized. the categories were almost the same as those found in the questionaire, although a few more sub-categories were added.

Next, the conformability of information between a speaker and a hearer was examined(Fig. 1). If the speaker and the hearer used the information of the

same category, as the speaker said "I have left my dictionary" (speaker's situation) and the hearer answered "Have you really left it?" (speaker's situation), then those information were counted as conformable. On the other hand, if the speaker and the hearer used the information of different category, as the speaker said "I have left my dictionary" (speaker's situation), and the hearer answered "I don't have one." (hearer's situation, then they were counted as the unconformable information.

Results showed that 1/2 to 2/3 of information used in each conversation was unconformable, suggesting that the speaker and the hearer share the same context and they used implicit information each other.

The developmental difference was that older subjects were apt to change the conformability as the relationship between the speaker and the hearer changed. That is, the older subjects used more conformable information when the relationship was more unfamiliar: a customer and a clerk, than family kinship or classmates. It is suggested that older subjects changed the use of information regarding to the addressee's knowledge of contextual information.

These results imply that the fundamental framework of production of refusals -- making use of cntextual information -- are aquired before the 3rd grade, but the use of it devel-

ops with age.

REFERENCE

Naka, M., & Muto, T. 1983 The effects of contextual infromation on understanding indirect requests. Japanese Journal of Educatioational Psychology, 31, 195-202.

Searle, J.R. 1975 Indirect speech acts. In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (Eds.), Syntax and semantics. Vol. 3, Speech acts. New York: Academic Press. Pp. 59-82.

Table 1:TYPES OF REFUSALS AND FREQUENCY(%)

Categories & Examples	3rd	5th	8th	Und.
<speaker's goal>				
You don't have to do that.	5	4	6	5
<speaker's situation>				
You have plenty time to do that.	0	0	1	6
<speaker's action>				
You can do that by yourself.	23	20	13	10
<X'S situation>				
Your brother has time to do that.	0	2	1	3
<speaker's action to ask X>				
Ask your brother.	17	15	14	15
<expectance of hearer's action>				
Don't expect me to do that.	1	1	0	1
<hearer's situation>				
I'm busy now.	26	39	45	44
<hearer's reason>				
I don't have to do that.	4	6	1	2
<speaker's action to ask hearer>				
Ask me later.	1	1	4	5
<hearer's action>				
I'll do that someday.	14	4	2	11

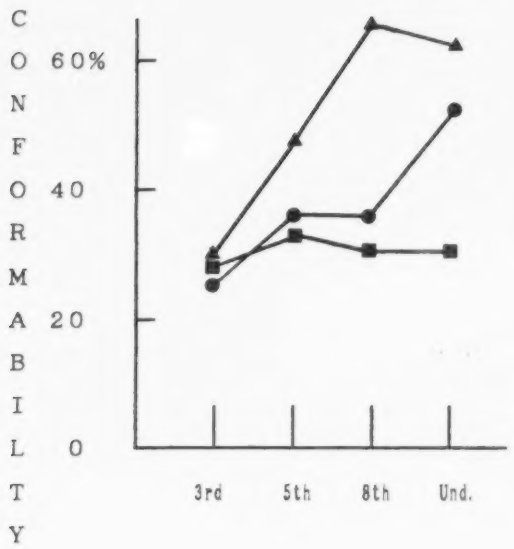

Fig. 1 CONFORMABILITY OF INFORMATION BETWEEN SPEAKER & HEARER

■ : brother-sister
● : classmates
▲ : customer-cllerk